

If Aliens Were Real

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Summary: An AU where Starfire is no Tamaranian Warrior; instead she is another kind of alien-an undocumented immigrant in Gotham city. This story follows the life of Coriander as child on the streets of Gotham. Future chapters will integrate the BatFamily as well as members of the Teen Titans. Additionally, this will be neither a happy nor pretty story. Rated M for a reason, please be aware

1. Lost Little Goat (Cori)

I know that I am not the only one that turns my face skyward, wishing that aliens were real. Unfortunately, they aren't; not in the way we wish they were. I am Cori, and I am an alien of a different sort—an illegal immigrant. I was brought to the US as an infant, smuggled here in my mother's suitcase on her quest to meet her husband. She was young, a mail-order bride to a wealthy man in Gotham City; I was his unwanted dowry, the child he'd never even imagined existed.

When my would-have-been stepfather saw me, his reception was indicative of that of the rest of this city—"Get rid of it." I like to think that my mother loved me, and that is why she found herself incapable of killing me; more likely she was just weak. Instead, she handed me off to her husband's housekeeper and swore her to secrecy.

All this I know from the housekeeper, Freya, who was my true mother. She named me (Coriander, for her favorite spice), raised me to the best of her abilities, and hid my existence from everyone; my mother, who no doubt assumed I'd been thrown out with the trash, my invisible stepfather, who has likely forgotten that I ever existed, and my two half-siblings, the twins Connie and Ryan, who have no idea that my mother was a mother before them.

Mor Freya was an immigrant herself, a Norwegian grandmother turned housekeeper in search of citizenship, and she did not speak English

well. She taught me what she could. My education, if you could even call it that, was spotty at best. The public schools in Gotham all required a social security numbers. The private schools didn't care, if you could afford the school, but Mor Freya could not. I knew my numbers in Norwegian and English, and I was fluent in Norwegian. I'd read classic Norwegian literature, when I'd had time. I could cook, I could clean, I could sew.

I had never seen a map. I had no idea how much of America there was in the world, and on the whole, I didn't care. I'd never known anything different from my life with Mor Freya, and I never wanted to.

It didn't matter what I wanted, though. The year I turned ten, the world shifted so quickly that I was knocked off my feet. Mor Freya grew ill, the way that old women displaced from home seem to, and she was forced into retirement from her housekeeping job. With still no citizenship and failing health, she couldn't afford to seek the help she neededâ€”she couldn't even afford the apartment we lived in anymore. She died the same day the landlord came to evict us.

She pressed a wad of bills into my hand, the very last of the money we had, and whispered to me as the landlord came up the stairs outside our door, "LÃ¡p, kjÃ¡re." I hesitated, and the landlord was knocking on the door. She pushed me towards the fire escape, using the last of her strength to push me. "LÃ¡p!" I obeyed, going out the ladder and down the stairs. On the platform, I looked back, and watched as the landlord checked her for a pulse.

I never knew that he saw me, but he did. Years later, I learned that they declared Mor Freya murdered, their prime suspect a bedraggled child that was witnessed fleeing the scene. I suppose, in retrospect, this could be considered my first brush with what some like to call the "criminal element."

The money Mor Freya gave me didn't last long. A ten year old needs more than 12\$ to survive, and food is expensive. It wasn't long before I found myself alone in Gotham, barefoot and bedraggled, standing alone in the rainy night. Days passed.

I wandered through streets I'd never seen before, unable to read their names or ask for help. People pushed me out of their way, unable or unwilling to spare more than a glance and a push for a minute girl in their way. My shoes were stolen the first night that I was on the streets, removed from my feet while I slept. This terrified me, so I stopped sleeping. If I hadn't been found when I was, I would have died.

As it was, it was a close thing. I was crouched in an alley. I didn't know what day it was or how long it had been since Freya died. Shivering and barely conscious, I couldn't even recoil when I was approached.

To my ten year-old self, the boy that approached looked like a man. He was tall, maybe fifteen or sixteen, a black leather jacket on his shoulders, a half-smoked cigarette in his hand, his strawberry blonde hair hanging into his dark, dangerous eyes. He watched me from across the alley as he finished his cigarette. I watched him back, unsure what to expectâ€”no one else had even acknowledged me in so long that I was half-convinced I no longer existed.

Finished, he flicked the butt away and stepped closer.

"Hey, kid," his voice was rough, the way it gets when you've been smoking for years. Despite the danger that emanated from his form, his voice was indescribably kind. It didn't matter, my English wasn't good enough to recognize the colloquialism when I heard it.

"I-I am not a g-goat." I managed to choke out around teeth that were chattering louder than my voice. His sharp laughter echoed off of the bricks around us, reflecting off of the puddles on the ground and back into the foggy air, knives thrown carelessly.

"Do you have a farm, little goat?" He asked, concern in his voice. He was moving closer, and as I shook my head, he caught my wrist in his hand. He pulled me to my feet by my wrist. Even when I stood, he towered over me. "That's what I thought." His eyes roamed over my body, sizing me up. He took in my orange hair, my green eyes dulled by sleeplessness and hunger, the way my body was only barely containing my bones, and my dirty feet. "Do you have a name, little goat?" Intimidated but comforted at the same time, I responded immediately.

"Coriander." He looked into my face, searching for something. Finding it, he turned away and walked toward the street, pulling me behind him, a docile goat returning home from the market.

2. Abandoned (Cori)

[A/N: This is going to be the first chapter that really starts to become graphic. There will be sexual abuse, human trafficking, and underage rape. I do not ever condone any of these acts and will not allow commentary praising these acts on this story. However, I am including these acts within my story for two reasons. 1) These things do happen in real life, often unreported and ignored because of the age or cultural identity of the people involved. 2) I refuse to believe that this shit wasn't happening in Gotham (they were, canonically, actuallyâ€"the first person Jason Todd kills in the comics was a pimp), and for a girl in a gang with no options, I find it plausible for poor little Star to be caught up in it. Thanks for understanding!]

The boy's name was, as I later found out, Jason Todd. He was the leader of a street gang made up primarily of children, and they all stayed together in an abandoned apartment. At first, they let me stay with them and share their belongings, seemingly expecting nothing in return. I slept, ate what they let me, and began to return to normal. Little by little, Jason got to know me, speaking what little English I could understand.

I told him what had happenedâ€"that Freya had died, that I couldn't go to school. Looking back, these conversations are probably the ones that affected most the direction my life went within the gang. I certainly don't believe that it was due to any actual attraction on his part.

The gang let me coexist with them peacefully, ignoring me not, as I then thought, out of trepidation, but out of pity. After a month, I was finally asked for retribution. I was laying on the floor of the

apartment, in the space I had managed to claim as mine. Night had fallen on Gotham, and most of the rest of the gang was either out on the streets or asleep in the corners of the room when Jason strode into the apartment.

"Little goat!" He called as he strode in, his voice more harsh than usual. His nickname for me hadn't changed, and secretly, I was glad. It made me special. I stood up as he came in, glad to see him. He grabbed my hand, the same way he had the day he found me, and escorted me into his room.

Once inside, he closed and locked the door behind us. I'd never been inside his room before, and I looked around, trying to absorb it. Most of the small room was taken up by a bed with sheets and blankets, a luxury. The walls were barren, except for a poster of a man in all black, who was wearing a cowl. Around the edges of his room were the weapons, clothes, and books that he owned. Jason was the only one of us that actually went to school—he said he had a promise to fulfill.

While I examined his room, Jason watched me, an expression I couldn't read on his face. With no warning, he reached out and hugged me. Unsure of what had brought on this affection, I hugged him back. I was just happy to be wanted.

"I'm going away soon, little goat." He said, his hand in my hair. "I'm being trained for a new job, one that can make a difference in the world," his voice was softer than usual. I stayed quiet, saddened by the thought of losing the only person I had. "But to get this job, I have to cut ties with everything in my life. I'm leaving the gang to James." I shiver at the thought. James never stayed with the gang, but he was arguably second-in-command. However, James was cruel, as far as I had seen. He'd hit some of the other members, and his face was joyful as he struck them. "I'm so sorry," Jason whispered. I wasn't sure why, but I didn't know how to ask. "I can't stop him from this path, I would if I could. Please believe me." His voice broke, and I saw him truly then—a confused boy that couldn't stop what was happening.

"I believe you," I replied, trying to reassure my only friend. He looked me in the eyes, then, backing away from me slightly.

"Your eyes are like stars, little goat," my eyes were bright, but with tears, not fire.

"When are you leaving?" I asked, my voice pitiful. It may have only been a month, but it had been a quiet, happy month, and that had meant the world to me. In answer, a knock came on the door.

"Now." He said, recomposing his face, forcing himself back into the charade of a man that I know knew him to be. He unlocked and opened the door to James himself. As James entered and Jason left, I thought I saw a tear run down Jason's face.

Too soon, James closed the door behind him. The lock clicked menacingly. James was older than Jason, truly a man. I never knew why he'd been willing to follow Jason's lead, as young as he was, but it was clear now that James had been looking forward to seizing command. His face was twisted into a sneering, terrifying smile, and the light glinted off of his glasses and stringy unkempt brown hair.

"It's time for you to earn your keep, _little goat_." He paused, laughing at some internal joke of his. The laughter harshened his face, instead of smoothing it. "You know, Jason should have been calling you our cash cow. You're going to make us more than just a pretty penny." Confusion must have been written on my face, because James took it as an excuse to step closer and show me.

Afraid, I was rigid as he approached me. His hands formed claws that ripped my bedraggled shorts off of my hips, and he pushed me onto Jason's bed. Pulling my underwear off to join my shorts, he thrust a claw inside me, causing searing pain, drawing a cry from my mouth as I tried to get away from him. He grinned at my attempts, releasing me just long enough to free himself from the constraints of his own pants before he dragged me back to him.

"You know," he whispered in my ear as he pinned me beneath him, despite my struggles. Satisfied, he freed one of his hands from pinning mine and used it to grab my hip. "You're really lucky that it's me that's doing this," using the hand on my hip as leverage, he forced himself inside me, sighing as I shrieked at the pain. "I know plenty of people that would pay good money for a virgin as cute as yourself for their very own." He withdrew himself completely and realigned, entering harder than before, still whispering to me. "But you remind me so much of my sisterâ€¦" another exit, another, faster entrance, harder as he gained his momentum. My throat was raw from screaming, so I lay there silently as the tears streamed down my face and the pain washed over me. "I couldn't let you be given to just anyone, not when I had been craving this for so long." He ceased whispering as he built up his own pleasure and brought himself to an explosive finish within me.

He brought himself out for a final time, briefly cleaned himself and redressed, ignoring me as I continued to sob, unmoving on the bed.

"That was fun, Babs," he said, opening the door. "Let's do it again sometime." He left the room, and me to myself.

3. The Chains of Guilt (Jason)

The guilt was chasing me. What had I done? How could I have let this happen?

WHAP. Robin's staff hit me straight in the stomach, interrupting my mental tirade. Not for the first time, my mind had wandered in the direction of Cori, leaving me open to Dick Grayson's ruthless attacks. It just seemed like I couldn't get over what was probably happening to her right now. Because of me.

I had never rescued a kid off of the streets before. All the other kids in my gang, they had come to me from houses, schools, orphanages, but Coriâ€¦ I could still see the way she'd looked, slumped in the rain, her malnourished ribs poking out. I had saved her, given her a home. She'd quickly become a sister to me.

But when _the Batman_ hands you an opportunity, you just don't say no. A chance to be like him? A chance to break the law so that justice could prevailâ€¦ it was my dream. Still, when I left Cori

with that monster, I knew what would happen.

I just didn't expect a text from him after.

Nice fuck. Thanks, bro.

"Where's your brain today?" Dick's voice comes, almost incredulous. Dick was fourteen, shorter than me by almost a foot, and more egotistical than four of me in one person. "That's the fifth time this spar that I completely caught you off guard. You'd think that someone handpicked by Batman would have a little bit more focus." Despite his intention to the contrary, a hint of a whine colored the edge of Dick's voice. It was obvious to me, even then, that Dick felt that he was being replaced by me, and he didn't like it.

It took almost all of my mental will not to smack the kid upside the head. I may have only been two years older, but I was worlds more mature than him. I sighed, knowing exactly how to assuage Dick's fears about me usurping his position. Besides, I had promised the Batman that I wouldn't speak to anyone from my old life, for fear of my falling back to it. Dick didn't have those kinds of restraints, he could get Cori out before she was too far into that life to escape.

"There's this girl," I started, hesitant. Dick's face lit up. Even so young, Dick had been starting to build a playboy reputation to match that of his guardian, Bruce Wayne. "It's not like that, Dick," I clarified. "She's, like, ten or something." With these words, Dick's face took on a suspicious tint. "Anyways, I rescued her off the streets, but the new leader of my gangâ€¦ he's a seriously bad guy."

"Whatever," Dick responded, jaded. He thought, even then, that he'd already witnessed the worst of human depravity. It was a conversation Batman had to have with him many times that year. "She's like part of the gang, she's safe."

"No," I corrected him. "She's in danger." His eyes didn't believe me, I could see it. I didn't blame him, we'd been pranking each other mercilessly since I'd moved in, the fourteen year old's way of establishing dominance. Haphazardly, I decide to plunge onwards. "Anyways, I promised Batman I wouldn't go back, or I'd go get her out. It would mean a lot to me if you would go do it for me."

I watch Dick roll his eyes, apparently dismissing the entire request as a prank.

"Whatever, sure." His response was sassy enough for two people his size, and I told him so. He picked his staff back up and rolled back onto the mat, challenging me to yet another sparring match before our formal training would begin.

I didn't know that Dick had never followed up until months later. By that point, Batman and I had already started to have disagreementsâ€¦"I have no qualms over killing scum that will only ever go on to keep harming the innocentâ€¦"and I set out on my own to corner James and get Cori away from him, before he could hurt her any more than he already had.

It took me a long time to hunt James down, longer than I'd ever like

to admit, but eventually I found him, drinking in some dive bar, laying low from his position as the Commissioner Gordon's son.

"Hey, man!" he shouted cheerfully when he saw me. "Things not work out with going straight?"

"They're fine," I replied, tersely. I scanned the bar, but didn't see Cori anywhere. I took this as a good sign.

"That's a damn shame," he continued cheerfully. "You always had a head for keeping organizations like this afloat. I'm lucky I managed to sell off that goat girl for as much as I did, or the gang would barely be afloat." He trailed off, watching me carefully.

"You sold her?" I asked, hoping for nonchalance, but it still came out pissed. "To who?" He laughed at my reaction, relishing the emotion on my face. Since I'd last seen him, James had deteriorated faster than I'd thought possible. He was always a little cruel and sadistic, but now, he struck me, for the first time, as psychopathic. "She was ten, you ass! A little girl!"

"She told me she was twelve," he shrugged. "As to who I sold her to, they're probably out of the country by now at the very least. A science group, called the Psions. Paid me twice what most men would pay for virgins her age so I figured why the hell not." Unbidden, my hand shot out and grabbed him by his shoulder, pinning him to the wall behind him. My elbow came up to rest not so gently on his windpipe.

"Where did they take her?" He only smirked in response, so I pressed harder on his windpipe, before yanking him off of the wall and slamming him onto the table. The bartender looked up and then went back to pretending not to notice the sort of violence that best characterized this area of Gotham. James began to gasp and pant, unable to breathe enough air to alleviate the symptoms of choking.

"Peru," he gasped. I turned to leave, but I couldn't resist letting out one last bit of my anger at the situation, at the egotistical Dick Grayson, at the unfair Batman, at James himself for being such a scumbag, at the universe itself for keeping me from protecting the girl that deserved it most. I pivoted, punching him in the stomach as hard as I've ever hit a man. He stumbled backwards, shocked into a cliché as I finally stalked off. "I will make you regret this, Jason Todd!"

"Bet I won't," I shot over my shoulder as I stepped out of the bar into the cold night air.

Peru.

I'm coming for you, Little Goat.

4. Sold (Cori)

[A/N: I know this one is a bit short, but another longer one will be up soon. I'm trying really hard to only swap POV on chapter swaps, but let me know if things are confusing to read and I will try and fix it. Thanks-AP]

After Jason left, my life started to deteriorate. As James put it, at least I had a job now. The oldest job, apparently.

At first, every new encounter was a fresh hell, just as excruciating as the first, but as the days turned into months, I started to grow numb, a testament to the human ability to shut down and survive. I became a shell of myself.

When James told me that he had sold me, it was not a surprise. Since Jason left, many of the gang members had warned me "run, get out, bad things happen to girls in this trade. I knew they were right, but I had nowhere to go. The night he sold me, he called me out of Jason's room, which I had claimed in his absence. I wore the white nightgown that had been purchased for me, a thin, flimsy thing that barely covered my thighs. James handed me a glass of water, a pill dissolving in the bottom of the glass, but I knew better than to ask what it was.

"Drink this," He said, roughly. "You're about to finally make us all that money I was promised." I nodded, mutely, and drank, unsure what to expect. The drink tasted acidic, and I felt woozy before finishing it. Scared, I turned to run away, but collapsed into darkness before I could even take a step.

Which brings me to just now. I wake in a room. The furniture, a chair and a bed, were wooden, but with soft curved edges. The bed has raised edges and a soft white mattress. My head is resting on a single pillow, and a grey blanket is tucked around me. I am only awake a few minutes before the only door in the room opens. A familiar man steps in, closing the door behind him.

He is tall, with strawberry blonde hair and a kind expression. He wears a worn leather jacket that I would recognize anywhere.

"Jason?" I ask, happy to see him. I get out of bed and go to hug him, but he shoves me away, hard.

"You're useless," he growls at me, moving towards me. "A waste of space, and ungrateful. How dare you take up space in my gang, my home?" His delivery is cruel and cold, how I've seen him reprimand other members, but never me.

"Iâ€¦ I'm sorry." I manage to get out, but he slaps me across the face. I flinch violently. "Beklager!" I cry, the pain and confusion dragging my native tongue out of me. He smirks at this, and leaves.

I don't understand what just happened. How could Jason have felt this way, when he was so nice to me? In this confusion, all of my questions about who bought me have disappeared. The only thing that matters is that I have been nothing but a burden on the only person that has ever taken care of me willingly. How could I be so awful?

Time begins to pass again. The only marking of time I have is the delivery of a liquid through a slot in the door and Jason's visits. Jason visits often, always repeating the same sentiments as before, pushing and hitting me until I respond in Norwegian. I'm afraid of

him, now, because I'm waiting for him to not stop when I cry in my native tongue. When he does, I'm sure that he will kill me.

How I experience things, my personality, everything, shatters. I have returned to my shell of docility and further retreated within myself. The only time I surface is to apologize in Norwegian and to cry at what I believe to be night.

It's hard to tell.

It's hard to care.

5. Heroics (Dick)

I had never truly believed Jason when he told me about the girl he left. I categorically rejected it. _Obviously_ he was just trying to get me to fall for his prank. _Obviously_ Jason would never request me to break Batman's carefully laid rules for a reason.

God, I was such a douchebag.

I never believed him until we finally managed to hack into the live feed surveillance of a lab belonging to the Psion Corporation in Peru. We flipped through feed after feed of scientists staring at computer screens, typing up papers, and drawing graphs. You know, science stuff. Finally, we got a live feed of a girl sitting with her legs crossed on a bed.

"Is that her?" I asked, unable to make out any colors through the grainy feed. Jason leaned closer to the screen, his leather jacket brushing my shoulder.

"I'm not sureâ€¦" He trailed off. I shrugged and flipped to the next feed. Another girl, this one laying down. Tears streak down her face. "That's her!" Jason's fingers jabbed at the screen. He turned to me, desperation in his face. I knew what he was going to ask before he did. "Dick, we have to save her."

We both turned back to the screen, contemplative. I thumbed the intercom's button and waited for Alfred to answer.

"Master Dick?" came the soothing British accent of the Wayne Manor's Butler and only servant, Alfred.

"Yeah, Alfred, I was just wondering how long Bruce was going to be out of town." I replied, smoothly.

"Three weeks, I believe he said, sir. Would you like me to contact him?" I rapidly shook my head, a guilty look on my face, before I realized that Alfred couldn't actually see my face.

"That won't be necessary. Jason and I will be taking the Batplane for a spin, we should return sometime tomorrow." I could feel Alfred's disapproval, but he didn't say anything, so I started setting up the plane before he could forbid me. Jason raised his eyebrows at me, but didn't complain, and before the end of the hour, we were setting out.

The trip to Peru felt short, though it was actually about seven hours

or so. Jason put on the auto-pilot and we plotted our entrance. As far as we could tell, the scientists retired to separate wing at night, and it looked like only two or three guards were left to patrol the compound.

The compound itself was high in the Andes Mountains, almost completely cut off from civilization. Despite the building's altitude, it was a squat, ugly, gray building. Fortunately for us, the compound had its own airstrip.

It was almost midnight when we landed, our descent completely silent compared to the sound of the winds hitting the mountains. The lone outdoor guard was disabled softly and silently, a blow to the back of the head.

I retrieved my lockpicking kit, expecting to need it on the main entrance, but Jason tried the handle before I got over to it. The door swung open.

"I guess they weren't expecting visitors," I joke, trying to break the tense silence. Jason just shook his head, clearly nervous. I looked at his face before I realized: this was his first mission. He'd never been out with Batman before. I groaned internally. Batman was going to kill me.

Without too much more effort, we found our way to where their experiments were held. We passed hallways of empty rooms and rooms that smelled like death before we finally found the right room. I picked the lock and Jason strode in.

"Cori?" He asks, only to be greeted by a shout in a foreign language and the sound of someone falling. I walk in behind Jason to see the girl Jason had described: a skinny girl with orange hair and bright green eyes. She was huddled on the floor, as if she expected Jason to attack her, and she was sobbing, one word over and over: "Beklagerâ€| beklagerâ€| beklager." She hadn't seen me behind Jason.

I pulled Jason out of the room. He was shell shocked, unsure what had just happened, why Cori had reacted like she had. I pushed him down the hallway, towards the room where the other girl we'd seen had been held.

"Let me handle this for now, okay?" he nodded, his face carefully blank. "Go get the other girl." He turned to go, his face beginning to harden into stone. I allowed myself a deep breath, and then returned to the room.

With Jason gone, she had returned to her bed, but she didn't know what to do with me. She stared at me, mutely. I approach her, slowly, the way I would a wild catâ€"hands up, empty, and from an angleâ€"but she remained impassive as I approached.

With no effort, I pull her out of the bed to standing, and lead her out of the door and away from the direction that Jason headed. I just needed to get her on the plane and plan from there.

End
file.